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Areas of legal expertise:

PROPERTY LAW
Conveyancing including Collective Sales & Privatisation of MOF Estates, Leasing

CORPORATE LAW
Intellectual Property, Tax Advisory, Corporate Secretarial

FAMILY LAW
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ESTATE PLANNING
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DISPUTE RESOLUTION
Arbitration & Litigation

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Incorporating the practice of ABRAHAM LLC

Messrs Tan & Au LLP was founded in 1994. It was then known as Messrs Tan-Au Associates. In 2001, it merged with another law firm to become Messrs Tan & Au Partnership and in 2007, renamed as Messrs Tan & Au LLP. Messrs Tan & Au LLP is one of two pioneering law firms first registered with the Accounting & Corporate Regulatory Authority (ACRA) in line with the new LLP legislation for law firms. We offer full legal services in major areas of law including:-

- ***Litigation***
- ***Arbitration***
- ***Banking & Finance***
- ***Construction Law***
- ***Corporate Law***
- ***Conveyancing and Leasing***
- ***Trademark and Intellectual Property Law***
- ***Privatisation of HUDC estates***
- ***Collective sales of estates***

We practice extensively in both litigation and arbitration. We have argued in both the lowest tribunals and in the highest Courts in Singapore and have established and published landmark cases.

Our firm is experienced in handling a large number of owners having successfully completed the en-bloc sale of St. Michael's estate, termination of the strata title scheme at a development at Lorong L Telok Kurau, Singapore, en-bloc privatisation of Ivory Heights (654 units), Farrer Court (618 units), Waterfront View (583 units), Shunfu Ville HUDC Estate (358 units), and Minton Rise (342 units).

We are currently carrying out / selected to carry out the privatisation / enbloc sale of Braddell View (918 units), People's Park Centre (701 units), Pine Grove (660 units), Ivory Heights (654 units), SimsVille (522 units), Wintech Centre (104 units), and a development near the Istana (48 units).

We have successfully completed the en-bloc sale of Nassim Park (104 units), Regent Garden (31 units), Bright Apartments (20 units), and Sims Mansion (12 units). We have also successfully carried out the en-bloc privatisation of Hougang Avenue 7 HUDC estate (286 units), Serangoon North HUDC estate (244 units), Potong Pasir HUDC estate (175 units). We were involved in the proposed en-bloc sale of Koon Seng House, Eng Cheong Towers, Ridgewood Condominium (470 units), Park West Condominium (436 units), Central Green Condominium (412 units), Bedok Court (280 units), Pemimpin Industrial Building (54 units), Kembangan Plaza (47 units), Tanah Merah Mansion (36 units), Camellia Lodge (32 units), Sixth Avenue (25 units), Gilstead Mansion (24 units), Cosy Lodge (14 units), Wing Fong Mansions (130 units), and Wing Fong Court (88 units), the proposed en-bloc privatisation and sale of Neptune Court (752 units), as well as the privatisation of Laguna Park (528 units).

As the market leaders for privatization of HUDC estates and coupled with our decades of experience in the en-bloc sale of private estates, we are uniquely qualified to carry out the en-bloc sale of various other estates.

Carolyn Tan

Carolyn commenced her pupillage at Messrs Shook Lin & Bok in 1987 where she worked for nine months gaining exposure from all departments: namely litigation (including building contract arbitration), corporate and conveyancing/corporate secretarial departments. She then joined Messrs David Ong & Lim (no longer in existence) where she practiced in litigation and general corporate work. This was followed by a term at Messrs Rayney Wong & Company (no longer in existence) where she was involved chiefly in personal injury litigation and motor vehicle claims. Carolyn practised in Messrs Wong & Lim from 1990 where she worked for four years handling litigation (including arbitration) corporate matters (drafting joint venture agreements, debentures and sales agreements), as well as conveyancing (including advising on and drafting of tenancy agreements). She joined Messrs Tan-Au Associates in June 1994. Upon the merger of Messrs Tan-Au Associates with Messrs Thomas Au & Lim, she joined Messrs Tan & Au Partnership in February 2001 (now known as Messrs Tan & Au LLP) as a partner. She currently practices in litigation, corporate and conveyancing matters. She was also Lead Counsel in landmark cases in insurance, land law (including MCST law), estate and company law namely Cosmic Insurance Corporation Ltd v Ong Kah Hoe (t/a Ong Kah Hoe Industrial Supplies) & Anor (1997), Tai Sea Nyong v Overseas Union Bank Ltd (2002), Management Corporation Strata Title Plan No 2911 v Tham Keng Mun and others (2011), Daniel Long Say Ting v Nunik Elizabeth Merukh (2012), Ong Wui Swoon v Ong Wui Teck (2013), Mira S. v Susan Tsai (2013) and Teo Chee Kwang v Yi Kai Development Pte Ltd (2018), Raman Dhir v Management Corporation Strata Title Plan No. 1374 [2020] SGHC 19.

Carolyn graduated from the University of London (attending Queen Mary College) with a Bachelor of Laws (Honours). She is a barrister-at-law from the Inner Temple and a Fellow of the Singapore Institute of Arbitrators. She also holds a postgraduate Diploma in Business Law from the National University of Singapore taking subjects in Advanced Banking Law, Credit and Security Law and Revenue Law.

T.C. Au

T.C. Au obtained a Diploma in Maritime Studies from the Singapore Polytechnic in 1983. He was awarded a Bachelor of Laws Degree (Upper Second Class Honours) in 1989 from the University of Buckingham and a Postgraduate Certificate in Laws (PCLL) from City University of Hong Kong in 1994. He obtained a Master of Laws Degree from the University of London in 1997 taking subjects in Company Law, Admiralty Law, Marine Insurance and Carriage of Goods By Sea.

He is a barrister-at-law from Lincoln's Inn. Au trained interalia at Messrs Khattar Wong & Partners and Messrs Haridass Ho & Partners. He was called to the Singapore Bar as an Advocate and Solicitor in 1996. He then joined Messrs Tan-Au Associates. Upon the merger of Messrs Tan-Au Associates with Messrs Thomas Au & Lim, he joined Messrs Tan & Au Partnership in 2001 (now known as Messrs Tan & Au LLP).

Prior to legal practice, Au was a deputy executive director of a leading trade union in Singapore where for more than 20 years he oversaw employer/employee industrial relations, organised education and training activities, publications of the union's news journals and books and managed international relations with compatriots in overseas unions.

Karuppiah Chandra Sekaran

Karuppiah Chandra Sekaran is a British-trained solicitor, who was called to the Roll of Solicitors in England and to the Supreme Court of Singapore. He is a rare Singaporean who practices English law and Singapore law respectively.

In his active legal practice, K. Chandra Sekaran demonstrates the art of the strategic tactician in resolving corporate, commercial, and intellectual property matters. He works very closely with off-shore law firms on Trade Marks, Estate Planning, Family Law, Wills and Probate matters. He had conducted high-profile cases in Singapore, Malaysia, Australia, and United Kingdom. K. Chandra Sekaran's cases include the collapse of the Nicoll Highway in Singapore in 2004 and a high-profile employment matter at the High Court and Court of Appeal in Singapore in 2015 *(Enholco Pte Ltd v Schonk, Antonius Martinus Mattheus and Another)*

K. Chandra Sekaran is a Legal Advisor for the Singapore After-Care Association **(SACA)**.

K. Chandra Sekaran had contributed a paper on the need of enforcement measures on Active Mobility Act 2017 (No. 3 of 2017) on 04 April 2017 which brought the passing of the Land Transport (Enforcement Measures) Act in Singapore Parliament on 08 September 2018 to set new enforcement standards for personal mobility devices ("**PMDs**"). On 05 April 2022, Singapore Parliament had accepted K. Chandra Sekaran's recommendations on the White Paper on Women's developments.

K. Chandra Sekaran had published a highly regarded article, namely "Non-White and Prosecutions" for the British Royal Commission on Criminal Justice in 1993 which received personal mention from the House of Commons Select Committee (British Parliament), and Mr Justice Henry Brooke, the Chairman of the Law Commission of England and Wales, United Kingdom.

He was an Adjunct Lecturer at Singapore Accountancy Academy, MDIS, Temasek and Ngee Ann Polytechnics, PSB Academy, MDIS, and Humberside College and has public speaking experience giving seminars at DBS Corporate Organisations and community events of People's Association.

Professional memberships

- Law Society of Singapore
- Singapore Academy of Law
- Law Society of England and Wales (UK)
- Institute of Trademarks Attorney (UK)
- Chartered Institute of Arbitrators (UK)

Other memberships

- Sengkang South Citizens Consultative Committee, Jalan Kayu Branch (Ang Mo Kio GRC) and Fernvale Ward
- Lien Foundation
- St. Andrews Nursing Home
- Aces Senior Club
- Youth Olympic Games 2010
- SEA Games Committee 2015

Leong Kum Kwok

Kum Kwok graduated with a Bachelor of Laws (Hons) from the University of Singapore in 1979. Thereafter, he served in the Singapore Legal Service for more than 3 years holding various appointments such as Assistant Director of Legal Aid Bureau, Senior Registrar of Titles & Deeds and Deputy Controller of Residential Property. He was called to the Bar in 1982.

With more than 40 years' experience in Banking, Finance and Real Estate Laws

Kum Kwok has vast experience in banking, finance and real estate laws having practised principally in those areas for more than 40 years.

His clients included the Singapore Government, MNCs and foreign corporations

He has a wide spectrum of clients, ranging from private individuals, developers, MNCs, financial institutions to various statutory authorities, the Minister for Finance Inc and the Singapore Government.

Some Notable Cases

Some of the major cases he has handled include:

- Advising the LTA on land rights and title of various parties in several integrated MRT stations/light train stations/bus depots
- Acting for the CAAS on matters relating to the development of the Low Cost Terminal, lease sale of airport land and lease of airport land for hotel development
- Acting for SLF in the commercial development at AMK and leases of units in the shopping hub
- Acting for the owners in a REITS sale of a factory and leaseback
- Acting for the Singapore Government in the sale of a major commercial/office building in Orchard Road with a transaction value of more than S$830 million
- Acting for the Minister for Finance Inc in the sale of the common property to residents in a residential housing development at Marine Parade Road

Leong De Shun Kevin

*Kevin graduated from **Singapore Management University** in 2017 with a **Bachelor of Laws (Cum Laude)**. After completing his practice training as a solicitor, he joined Tan & Au LLP as an Advocate and Solicitor in 2018. Kevin is well versed in their various areas of legal practice including litigation, alternative dispute resolution, probate & administration, intellectual property law, corporate, and conveyancing work.*

Experience:

- Assisted in *inter alia* a subsidiary proprietor's appeal against his management corporation relating to "common property" (*Raman Dhir v MCST Plan No. 1374* [2021] 3 SLR 519 (HC); [2021] SGSTB 10; [2020] SGSTB 7); an interpleader action (*Tan & Au LLP v Seo Puay Guan & Ors* [2019] SGHC 59); a claim and appeal relating to bailment and a counterclaim for storage charges (*Clifford Eng K.F. v Twelve Degrees Pte Ltd* [2019] SGDC 22; HC/DCA 11/2019); appealing against a claim relating to the use of funds by an unincorporated association in the Court of Appeal (CA/CA 75/2017; *Devagi d/o Narayanan & Anor v Wong Poh Choy Tommy & Ors* [2018] 3 SLR 993 (HC)); resisting claims relating to insurance agency, resisting a claim for commission based on unjust enrichment / conspiracy involving eight parties and obtaining security for costs against the Plaintiff in the High Court.
- Assisted in mediation and/or obtaining settlements for cases involving *inter alia* Contractual claims, Commission, Medical Negligence, Motor Accidents, Personal Injury, Property Damage, Sale & Purchase of Goods and/or Services, Sale & Purchase of Shares.
- Assisted in an international arbitration relating to satellite bandwidth.
- Assisted in contested and uncontested probate & administration matters; advised on and drafted Wills (including joint and/or mutual wills); advised on and carried out the registration, withdrawal, and revocation of Lasting Powers of Attorney.
- Advised on and carried out the registration of Trade Marks; assisted in resisting a Trade Mark claim; assisted in the drafting of a Licence Agreement.
- Assisted in the drafting of various corporate documents including *inter alia* Agency Agreements, Escrow Agreements, Loan Agreements, Non-Circumvention / Non-Disclosure Agreements, Promissory Notes, Sale & Purchase Agreements, Shareholders' Agreements.
- Assisted in advising on Stamp Duties, COVID-19 support measures; drafting of Trusts (for property / Sale Proceeds), Option to Purchase, Tenancy Agreements; assisted in the privatisation and/or collective sale attempts of residential, commercial, and/or mixed-use developments.

Home owner Raman Dhir had appealed to the High Court after the Strata Titles Board dismissed his application seeking an order for the management corporation to rectify the faults and to reimburse him for repair works done.

The High Court ruled that the skylight over the entrance of a four-storey townhouse at The Balmoral fit the legal definition of common property as it affected the appearance of the building and could be "enjoyed" by fellow residents. PHOTO: COURT DOCUMENTS

Court rules in favour of home owner over common areas

Owner wanted management corporation to fix leaks from skylight, windows, roof

Selina Lum
Law Correspondent

The High Court has ruled in favour of the owner of a four-storey townhouse at The Balmoral who argued that the management corporation (MC) should take responsibility for water leakages in his unit as they originated from areas that are common property.

The court, in a written judgment on Thursday, reversed the decision of the Strata Titles Board (STB), which had said a flat roof above the house and the skylight over the entrance of the house did not fit the legal definition of common property.

Home owner Raman Dhir had appealed to the High Court after the STB dismissed his application seeking an order for the MC to rectify the faults and to reimburse him for repair works done.

Mr Dhir said water leaked into his house from a flat roof that covers a small enclosed area, various fixed window panels that run from the second to the fourth floor and the skylight.

Termite damage resulted from the leakages, he said.

He argued that the roof, windows and skylight are common properties and the MC was responsible for repairing them and the damage caused.

The MC contended that these were not common properties and that there was insufficient evidence on the origin of the leaks.

In July last year, the STB rejected Mr Dhir's claim, saying that without an expert report, it could not conclude that the leakages came from these three areas.

The board found that the windows were common property, but not the roof and the skylight, as they were for Mr Dhir's "exclusive use" and served only his unit.

But High Court judge Chan Seng Onn said the roof clearly fit the definition of common property as it was not part of the total strata area of Mr Dhir's unit.

He said the STB was wrong to conclude that the roof was exclusively used by Mr Dhir because he had used the area to install equipment such as air conditioner condensers without permission.

"A breach cannot possibly convert common property into personal property," the judge said, adding that the MC can ask Mr Dhir to rectify the breach.

The judge also said it was immaterial that the skylight served only Mr Dhir's unit, as it affected the appearance of the building and could be "enjoyed" by fellow residents, therefore satisfying the definition of common property.

Justice Chan said the board also erred in law by placing the burden of proof on Mr Dhir, when the law requires the MC to provide evidence to the contrary to rebut his claim.

He sent the case back to the board to hear and consider again.

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Court rules on money from sale of $4.3m home

Woman may use daughter's share to pay outstanding mortgage loans

By K. C. VIJAYAN
SENIOR LAW CORRESPONDENT

A HOUSEWIFE has won a High Court bid to use her daughter's share from the sale of their $4.3 million flat to settle outstanding mortgage loans.

A court order issued yesterday made clear that money from the sale be shared equally between Madam S. Mira, 63, and daughter Susan Tsai, 43 – who allegedly took out loans to buy other condo units.

Both were named joint owners of the plush apartment at The Morningside condominium by Madam Mira's businessman husband, Mr N. Salim, 67, who bought it more than 20 years ago.

Madam Mira had sought the order as her daughter Susan had allegedly used the flat as collateral to secure further mortgage loans without her knowledge, running up debts of around $2.9 million. The order, based on Justice Lai Siu Chiu's judgment last week, ruled that Mrs Tsai's share be used to settle outstanding loans.

Madam Mira stands to gain about $1.3 million in net proceeds following the loan deductions from the sale earlier this year. Previously, she had obtained court approval to sell the 2,800 sq ft double-storey River Valley Road flat to settle the outstanding sum.

In court documents submitted by her lawyer Carolyn Tan, it was stated the loans were taken out by the daughter between 2007 and 2011. Madam Mira claimed she received no benefits from them.

She also said her signatures on the loan documents were forged – a claim her daughter denied.

Mr Salim said he had sold another unit he owned in the same block to help pay off the debt due on the flat owned by his wife and daughter. He added that he supported his daughter's education in the United States.

Mrs Tsai, in submissions filed through lawyer Simin Sindhu, denied her mother was unaware of the loans. She claimed the money was borrowed on her mother's instruction, and the loans were taken to buy condo units as she intended to return and live in one of them with her children and rent out the rest. She said the acquired units were forfeited following payment defaults.

Mrs Tsai, an American housewife based in California, admitted the loans could not be repaid. Her submissions showed a frosty relationship with her mother.

She said her father bought the Morningside unit for her for doing well at school. Her parents had urged her to study medicine in the US and return to Singapore to practise. "My mom said in Hokkien 'your children can walk to attend River Valley Primary School'," the mother of two said.

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THE STRAITS TIMES MONDAY, DECEMBER 24, 2012

Tycoon's ex-driver 'acted honestly'

Judge finds him not liable for selling three condo units after boss' death

By K.C. VIJAYAN
LAW CORRESPONDENT

A DRIVER became the "spiritual confidante" of Indonesian tycoon Jusuf Merukh, who then named him a director of a company he owned.

When Mr Merukh, 77, died last year, Mr Daniel Long put up for sale three condominium units owned by cash-strapped firm Merukh Singapore Properties.

Dr Nunik Merukh, the executor of her father's estate, was opposed to the move but the properties were sold for about $4.5 million.

Mr Long has now successfully obtained a High Court judgment that ruled the company cannot hold him liable for selling the three units.

While he, as a director, is exempted under the Companies Act from being sued by the company, Justice Lee Seiu Kin declined to extend the relief sought under the Act by Mr Long against potential suits "which might be brought by persons other than the company".

The late Mr Merukh, a former Speaker of Indonesia's House of Representatives and a deputy minister, ran a vast business empire that included 14 companies he solely owned in Singapore.

He was a man of "no small means and influence", reputedly owning, among other things, 500 mining concessions in Indonesia, said Justice Lee in his 43-page judgment released last Thursday.

The three condo units Mr Long sold in September last year were in Bayshore Road, Kitchener Link in Serangoon and Bukit Drive in Bukit Timah.

His lawyers Carolyn Tan and Au Thye Chuen pointed out that their sale prices were higher than the cost of buying them.

Mr Merukh's estate issued two notices to rescind the sales but subsequently withdrew them on the advice of its lawyers.

But Dr Nunik said the moves were aimed at seeking clarifications, because to rescind the sales after the option papers had been signed would lead to losses.

Her lawyer Teh Ee-Von questioned the "fire sale", claiming the sale of just the Bayshore flat would have been enough to settle the company's debts of about $3.5 million, which included mortgage payments and staff salary.

Merukh Singapore Properties had been used by Mr Merukh as a "vehicle through which to devote his worldly trappings to Christian activities and staff welfare", said Justice Lee.

It paid the rent of the church he worshipped at in Singapore and for the purchase of a fleet of Rolls-Royce, BMW and Mercedes Benz cars.

Justice Lee also noted that Mr Long, who came to know Mr Merukh in 2005, had no business experience.

After his boss' death, Mr Long, as the "last rat on the sinking ship faced multiple pressures" to keep "the company from penalty and financial loss", the judge said.

Mr Long was the only director of the company.

After hearing all parties, the judge said he was satisfied that Mr Long had acted "honestly and reasonably and, having regard to the circumstances of the case, ought fairly to be excused from liability for negligence, default, breach of duty or breach of trust".

In his ruling, he also denied the claims of Motor-Way Credit on the company for debts incurred, since the cars it repossessed had depreciated in value.

Mr Merukh had bought the cars through Merukh Auto, another company he owned.

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BT 21/2/12

Chauffeur-turned director wins case against boss's estate

By **GRACE LEONG**

[SINGAPORE] A chauffeur-turned-director of Merukh Singapore Properties won relief against claims brought by the estate of late Indonesian mining tycoon Jusuf Merukh after the High Court found that he had acted honestly and reasonably in three property sales that he conducted following Dr Merukh's sudden death last June.

Justice Lee Seiu Kin, in a 43-page decision issued yesterday, found Daniel Long Say Ting, Dr Merukh's Mercedes limousine driver and spiritual confidant, "acted reasonably" when he granted the options to purchase on Sept 5, 6 and 9, 2011, for all three properties at the price and speed at which he did, and that his decision was "not motivated by intent to gain an improper benefit or advantage for himself".

"Neither did his failure to place the decision before shareholders in general meeting reek of deceit and impropriety," he said. "Rather, his omission seemed to me to be a genuine oversight. I say this in light of (Mr Long's) repeated attempts to extract a response from the Indonesians regarding the marketing of the three properties, and to obtain the signature of the administrator or the executor of the estate on the circular board resolution . . . to sell all three properties and discharge the debts of the family companies in Singapore."

Mr Long's friendship with Dr Merukh had developed since July 2005 through their common religious beliefs, and he began taking on responsibilities far beyond his chauffeuring role when he helped Dr Merukh source and buy condominium units in Singapore in June 2007. He was later given power of attorney to manage and carry out Dr Merukh's business transactions and made local representative for his various business ventures.

Mr Long, who became Merukh Singapore's full-time local director despite having no prior business experience, was responsible for incorporating a total of 14 companies in Singapore that were all wholly owned by Dr Merukh.

A deeply religious man, Dr Merukh saw Merukh Singapore, an investment company, as a vehicle through which to devote his worldly trappings to Christian activities and staff welfare, according to the ruling. The company paid for the rental of the church he worshipped at in Singapore, bought a fleet of Rolls Royce, BMW and Mercedes Benz cars and hired chauffeurs to provide transport for his family, staff, business associates and pastors of his church.

Mr Long, who sought relief after getting threats of criminal and civil action in legal notices issued by the estate, argued that he had sold the three properties to avert "the spectre of repossession" as UOB had allegedly threatened legal action after the company fell behind on various obligations including monthly loan instalments for the properties.

The three properties are Blk 72, Bayshore Road, #29-16, Costa Del Sol; 10 Kitchener Link, #13-18, City Square Residences; and 87 Bukit Drive, #06-18, The Raintree.

Nunik Elizabeth Merukh, Dr Merukh's daughter and personal executor of her father's estate, objected, claiming that Mr Long failed to seek the company's prior approval in general meeting, and accused him of failing to act in the best interests of the company and the estate.

But Justice Lee noted that since the property market had fallen even further after September 2011, "it was in hindsight fortunate for (Merukh's estate) that the properties had been sold quickly and at a profit".

Carolyn Tan and Au Thye Chuen of Tan & Au LLP, Mr Long's lawyers, pointed out that the sale prices – $1.9175 million for the Bayshore property, $1.551 million for the Kitchener property and $1.19 million for The Raintree property – had exceeded the purchase prices of $1.9162 million, $1.55 million, and $1.155 million respectively, and were only slightly lower than the minimum prices that the Merukh family had desired.

Further, the sale prices were very close to the market prices of $1.917 million, $1.545 million and $1.188 million stated in the valuation report. Mr Long's lawyers, who referred to anticipated government cooling measures and the instability of financial markets, argued that this was an "achievement considering the poor market conditions at the time".

But Teh Ee-Von of Infinitus Corp, the Merukh estate's lawyer, argued that the manner in which the sale had been conducted was objectionable. She questioned the "fire-sale" manner in which the options had been granted, stating that this was unnecessary since the sale proceeds of the Bayshore property would have sufficed to cover the most pressing debts (the employees' salaries and CPF contributions, penalty for late payment of CPF contributions, and the outstanding instalments for the three properties).

Ms Teh also argued that there was no urgency to sell the properties because the estate had in August 2011 obtained a six-month grace period from UOB for payment of the outstanding instalments. But there was no evidence to show that Mr Long was notified of the grace period.

Mr Long, who was personal guarantor of the debts of another Merukh company, Merukh Republic Auto, faced a claim from creditor, Motor-Way Credit, for the shortfall caused by the depreciation of repossessed cars. In addition, the salaries and CPF contributions of the staff of Merukh Singapore and Merukh Auto, including that of all the hired chauffeurs remained outstanding. In fact, Merukh Auto was charged with violations of the Central Provident Fund Act after it failed to heed warnings throughout July and August 2011 threatening penalties and criminal sanctions.

Indeed, Justice Lee found that Mr Long had "consistently made clear" that his purpose for trying to get a buyer for the three properties was to raise funds "to meet the most pressing payments".

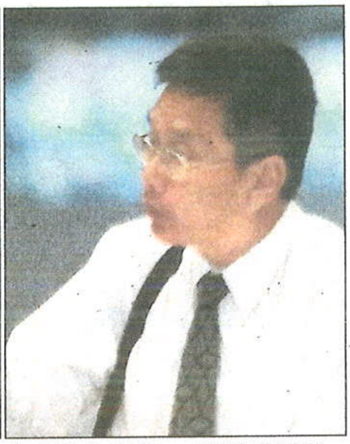
"I did not find that the manner in which the sales had been carried out, or the failure to seek the approval of the shareholders in general meeting, was conduct so careless and imprudent that a reasonable person would have concluded that it was dishonest and involving moral turpitude."

In finding that Mr Long should be relieved from liability for any negligence, default, breach of duty or breach of trust in his capacity as the company's director, Justice Lee said that Mr Long didn't act negligently in failing to find more buyers offering a higher price.

"The property market had been soft at the end of 2011 due to anticipated cooling measures. The consequence of the breach was not severe as . . . the sale prices secured for each of the three properties not falling more than $150,000 short of the minimum prices stipulated (by the estate), and are in any case, higher than the original purchase prices."

If anything, Justice Lee said, he "was convinced that Mr Long was not appointed to the directorships for his business experience or training, but rather based on the trust that the deceased had in him as a spiritual confidant". "With this in mind, I was minded to conclude that (Mr Long) would indeed have acted likewise had the debt, and the three properties sold, been his own."

C M Y K

王伟纯指哥哥王伟德“吃掉”了她应得的遗产。（邬福梁摄）

3年前为母遗产打官司 3年后为父遗产对簿公堂

傅丽云

50岁女商人王伟纯指哥哥王伟德（58岁，商人）把帮爸爸保管的公寓卖掉，再用卖屋得来的钱另外买了一栋排屋，“吃掉”了她应得的遗产，她因此把哥哥告上法庭。

不过，王伟德说，公寓本来就是他的，爸爸给了他一些钱买公寓，那是爸爸给他的礼物，他再用公积金、储蓄和贷款来填补不足。而那栋排屋则是他的妻子用自己的钱买的。

这对兄妹曾在2006年，针对母亲周真贞所立的遗嘱是否有效，在3年内打过至少7轮的遗产官司。

当时，王伟德是起诉人，另外三名弟妹与王伟纯站在同一阵线，形成一对四的局面。

最高法院上诉庭在2009年9月宣判母亲的遗嘱有效，王伟德因此额外得到5万元。

为洋房“缩水”打官司三屋主败给“面积解读”

高庭司法委员符晓平去年4月审理3B号屋主的上诉时，认为“分层楼面”与“分层面积”有相同意思，与起诉人所用的“楼面”不同，裁定该屋主指发展商误导和面积不够都“站不住脚”，驳回上诉。其他两人官司也败诉，其中一人将上诉高庭。

傅丽云 报道
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三个聚落式洋房主人称，买房后才发现房子面积比宣传册列明的小，原本有屋顶花园的房子，以斜面屋顶取代，而总面积也包括斜面屋顶的面积。他们分头采取法律行动，指发展商误导和违约，却因为分层面积和楼面解读的法律问题，都被判败诉。

其中两起官司到高庭开打，由助理主簿审理，但一个放弃上诉，另一个涉及门牌3B号上诉高庭司法委员后，依然失败，原打算继续向终审法庭再上诉，最终与发展商取得和解，才停止上诉行动。

高庭司法委员符晓平（现为高庭法官）去年4月审理3B号屋主的上诉时，认为“分层楼面”（strata floor area）与“分层面积”（strata area）有相同意思，与起诉人所用的“楼面”（floor area）不同，裁定该屋主指发展商误导和面积不够都“站不住脚”，驳回上诉。

她指宣传册只是构想图，只有一行字说会包括屋顶花园，但显示的所有房子的屋顶都是斜面的，而平面图也没描绘屋顶花园。单从宣传册来看，有没有屋顶花园其实“既不清楚也不含糊”。

她不认为起诉人是因为宣传册有屋顶花园的陈述才签约。多层单位明细表已个别列出楼面，如宣传册有任何误导，就当与合约和多层面积证书一起修正。这些文件都寄给买方律师，买家签约前，律师应已通知文件内容。

第三起涉及门牌3C号。原屋主张志光（商人，60多岁）选择到国家法院打官司，来回打了五轮（包括高庭），最终还是被驳回。张志光不服，准备上诉高庭，上诉料下月中审理。

被起诉的发展商毅凯发展（Yi Kai Development），在培熙道（实龙岗一带）的永久地段兴建了15个半独立式洋房。

起诉人由陈明慧律师代表。根据诉方，2007年间，房子尚未建好，张志光观看建筑模型和宣传册，相中一栋有独特水景装置的洋房。

宣传册注明房子总面积达347平方米，包括屋顶花园、庭院、私人停车场、花槽和凸窗等。

同年7月，诉辩双方签的买卖交易合约，注明洋房卖价189万元，面积346平方米，却没说明面积也包括屋顶。

2010年间，洋房盖好后，张志光发现总面积比宣传册小，连取代屋顶花园的斜面屋顶也无法使用。

专家测量少了数十平方米

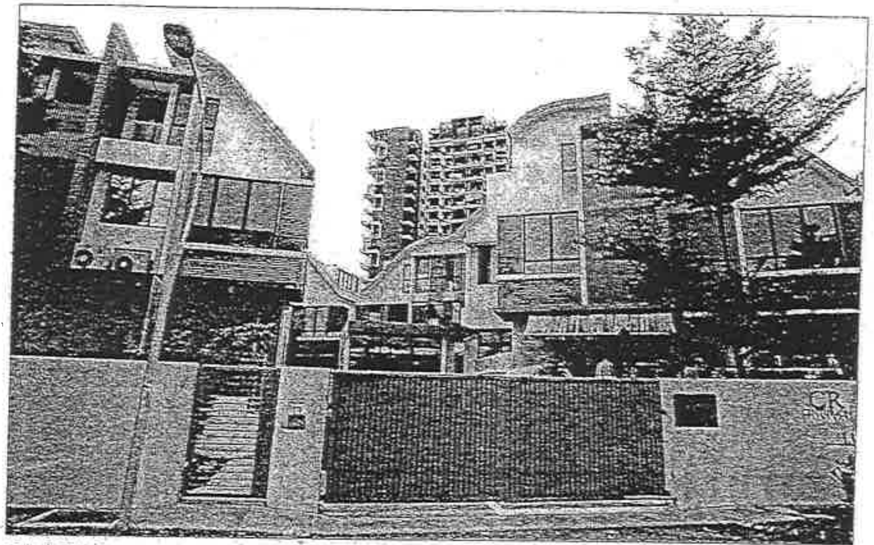
经专家测量房子，发现面积仅337平方米；扣除斜面屋顶面积，实为278平方米。房子也无水景装置，以黑墙替代，阻挡风向和全景。

经计算，张志光称，为面积的落差多付了25万元。房子面积和一些缺陷，使他难找到买家。

由洪嘉律师代表的发展商否认少给面积，指宣传册的347平方米也包括斜面屋顶的开敞空间（void area），即合约提的分层面积，非起诉人指的楼面。起诉人既然无条件签约，就须接受洋房总分层面积为346平方米，不能就面积提出投诉。

辩方否认误导起诉人有关屋顶花园的事，指它签约时有足够理由相信所有陈述是真实的。

辩方说，它准备宣传册时采取了合理的慎重态度，无须为任何不准确的内容负责，起诉人的陈述只是其看法，而非事实，全部资料以印刷时为准，因需要可能有所更动。任何得通过当局批准的变动，不能构成合约的部分。起诉人所看到的只是构想图，面积只是估计，须经最后测量确定。



毅凯发展的Centurion Residences，引起三名屋主不满，认为面积比宣传册列明的小。（林国明摄）

至于屋子难卖，辩方说，起诉人在2010年底，以220万元卖房。但起诉人称扣除贷款和持守成本，他是亏钱卖屋。

审理张志光案件的国家法院法官陈佩文，认为3C的索偿类似3B的案件。他不必受缚于3B案的裁决，却认同司法委员符晓平的看法，认为3C索偿的确站不住脚，所以决定撤销，并下令张志光承担发展商2700元的讼费。

Motor insurance case keenly watched

Outcome may affect how insurers write risks in future

THE motor insurance industry is keenly watching for the outcome of a legal tussle which is likely to have an impact on all motorists and the way insurance companies write risks in future.

The case is Cosmic Insurance Corp versus Ong Kah Hoe. Cosmic, which had insured Mr Ong, tried to bankrupt him as it could not get him to pay up a sum of $346,429.67 which Cosmic had paid out as compensation to the estate of a cyclist who was killed in an accident involving a lorry driven by Mr Ong's brother-in-law.

Cosmic paid by virtue of an agreement signed in 1975 between the Motor Insurers' Bureau of Singapore (MIB) and the government and a secondary agreement between the MIB and all its members, which are the insurance companies.

The MIB was formed to compensate victims if offending motorists could not be traced, as in hit-and-run cases, or were uninsured, or there was ineffective insurance.

Mr Ong's case fell under the ineffective insurance provisions because his brother-in-law drove when he was under suspension from driving and he had also been forbidden by Mr Ong to drive.

The High Court, in a landmark decision made by Justice MPH Rubin, dismissed Cosmic's claim.

Cosmic is appealing the dismissal of its claim.

Lawyers say that if the Court of Appeal confirms Justice Rubin's decision, it could change the way insurers underwrite the business.

Right now, under the ineffective insurance clause, the insurer can recover from the policyholder even if the accident was caused by a thief who was driving the policyholder's car after stealing it, said one lawyer.

"Basically it will mean motorists can fight such claims by referring to the Cosmic decision," said one lawyer.

ST. 26/5/06

Nassim Park may break collective sale record

Owners hope for better price than Eng Lok Mansion's $1,218 psf ppr

CHOICE SITE: Owners of freehold Nassim Park have yet to name a figure but believe its superb Nassim Road position will fetch a higher price than the record psf ppr price bagged by Eng Lok Mansion.

By KELVIN WONG
Property Correspondent

OWNERS at the high-end Nassim Park condominium are out to wrest the title of Singapore's most expensive collective sale site from Eng Lok Mansion.

Fourteen-year-old Nassim Park, which is just a stroll from Orchard Road, is a plum site to bag.

Owners have yet to name a figure but believe its superb Nassim Road position will fetch a higher price, on a per sq ft per plot ratio (psf ppr) basis, than Eng Lok. The psf ppr is an industry yardstick that measures the price of each square foot of potential gross floor area.

Eng Lok in Napier Road achieved a record $1,218 psf ppr in March, but Nassim Park's marketing agent, Savills Singapore, is confident it can do better.

"Freehold sites in prime districts are always in demand but this site is the creme de la creme of all the sites available in the market," said managing director Michael Ng. "We would expect the price to surpass what was paid for Eng Lok and Beverly Mai." Beverly Mai on Tomlinson Road was sold last month to Hotel Properties at $1,184 psf ppr.

If Nassim does achieve at least as much as Eng Lok, it will sell for $418 million, including an estimated development charge of $8 million. Its owners will reap prices significantly above the open market rate. That will also make it the highest absolute price paid for a collective sale transaction, surpassing the $385 million earlier this week for the 99-year leasehold Waterfront View in Bedok Reservoir Road, an estate of 583 units.

But some property experts baulked at the comparison with Eng Lok, which they deemed a "special case".

"The Eng Lok buyer was not your typical developer. It had certain plans for it and therefore was prepared to pay that kind of price," said one.

Former Parkway Holdings boss Tony Tan, whose Napier Properties bought Eng Lok, has said he wants to build medical suites on the site, which is next to Parkway's Gleneagles Hospital.

But Mr Ng, noting that Nassim Road was largely made up of good-class bungalows, said: "There are no large condominium sites other than this one in the area."

Nassim Park is a 245,135 sq ft freehold site with 104 apartments and townhouses. It has a plot ratio of 1.4 and a height restriction of four storeys. This means that a new project could comprise about 160 apartments from 1,900 to 2,200 sq ft, Savills Singapore said.

Almost 80 per cent of the owners – the required minimum – have backed the sale. "We are sure that once we get offers at this price level, we will breach the 80 per cent mark," said Mr Ng.

Savills Singapore, which is scouting for buyers in an expression of interest exercise until June 21, said it already has some foreign developers looking at the project.

Its estimated breakeven cost is almost $1,700 psf so owners could reap more than twice what they would from selling individually.

The last transacted sale of a Nassim Park apartment was last month at about $750 psf, the company said.

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NEPTUNE COURT PRIVATISATION

Residents approve appointment of lawyer

Now, plan is to negotiate for better privatisation fee

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SINGAPORE — Residents of Neptune Court voted yesterday to appoint law firm Tan & Au to undertake the privatisation of the sprawling estate.

Yesterday's meeting to amend the constitution, appoint a law firm and approve the privatisation committee lasted three hours amid heated outbursts from some residents.

One complaint was the alleged lack of transparency in how the Neptune Court Owners' Association (NCOA) had gone about its plans.

"They claim there was an open tender in selecting a law firm, but none of us knew about it and it was done without our consent," said a long-term resident who did not want to be named.

But addressing the meeting, NCOA's president Tommy Wong, said: "We selected (Tan & Au) for their talent, experience and capability for detail such that owners will not suffer any financial loss ... and their terms of no success, no payment."

While the previous committee had consulted the law firm some two years ago, this is the first time the NCOA has moved to appoint it.

Some 250 residents, representing fewer than half of the 752 units, turned up for the meeting yesterday. In all, 205 residents voted to appoint Tan & Au while 20 objected.

The privatisation committee was endorsed with a majority vote of 146.

There is still some way to go before privatisation becomes reality, with the agreement of 75 per cent of all the owners needed. For now, the Neptune Court Privatisation Committee (NCPC) together with its lawyers plan to meet the Ministry of Finance — which owns the land — and Singapore Land Authority to negotiate a better privatisation fee, said NCPC's chairman David Ho.

In 2007, the residents were quoted a fee of $144 million to privatise the 99-year leasehold estate, but in June last year were given a new figure of just $40 million, which worked out to roughly $50,000 per unit.

Just down the road, the 480-unit Lagoon View estate last year was quoted an estimated $12 million, or $28,000 a unit.

Retired civil servant Yahya Aljaru, 69, and retired manager, Mr Fadzakir Fadzlil, 67, both of whom have resided at Neptune Court since 1975, are looking forward to privatisation and a likely en bloc sale effort thereafter.

"I'll take it if they make me an offer I can't refuse," said Mr Fadzakir.

"I've simple needs. I don't need a swimming pool, a snooker room. I'll use the proceeds to go travelling and leave some for the kids."

10 Residents of Neptune Court have voted to appoint law firm Tan & Au to undertake the privatisation of the sprawling estate.

Potong Pasir HUDC blocks set to go private

3 blocks secure more than 75% support from residents

By Daryl Chin

THE three blocks of HUDC flats in Potong Pasir are now a step closer to being privatised.

At the end of a three-day, weekend drive to collect signatures, about 150 households out of the 175 in Blocks 110, 111 and 112 Potong Pasir Avenue 1 had signed on the dotted line, signalling their support.

This 85 per cent support level exceeds the minimum 75 per cent required by the Government for privatisation to go ahead. With this development, the only HUDC estate on the island that has not been given the go-ahead for privatisation is Braddell View.

MP for Potong Pasir Sitoh Yih Pin said he was heartened by the residents' response: "The residents have shown their support and many have signed. We'll still try to get more signatures as some of them are overseas."

The Government had given these three Potong Pasir blocks, along with 15 blocks in two HUDC estates in Hougang, the green light to go private in July 2010.

Of the two Hougang estates, one was successfully privatised last April. The other has just secured its 75 per cent approval level.

Privatisation makes HUDC residents the owners of their units and the common property, which gives them better control over the running of their estate.

The residents each have to pay a set sum, including legal and survey fees, for this. After privatisation, an HUDC estate will, for example, no longer fall under Housing Board (HDB) regulations, such as those governing the seeking of approval before sub-letting a unit.


About 150 households out of the 175 in the three HUDC blocks at Potong Pasir Avenue 1 have signalled their support for plans to privatise their blocks. ST PHOTO: NURIA LING

Mr Sukhmindar Singh, a 53-year-old operations manager who chairs the pro-tem committee for the Potong Pasir privatisation bid, said: "The committee worked as a team, and we had to speak to residents who wanted more incentives from the Government before they would agree to going private."

The cost of privatisation is capped at $30,000 per flat in Hougang and Potong Pasir, with the Government absorbing the difference if it exceeds this.

A resident, a housewife who declined to be named, said she had hoped to get more: "Our estate isn't in the best condition. Sometimes, the lifts break down. I hope everything will be in better condition before it's handed over to us."

There are 18 HUDC or Housing & Urban Development Company estates in all, located in places such as Bishan, Farrer Road and Pine Grove. They were introduced in 1974 to meet the demand for homes by middle-income households priced out of private property, and phased out in 1987 when more housing choices were introduced.

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THE STRAITS TIMES WEDNESDAY, JULY 2, 2014

Potong Pasir HUDC estate goes private but 'price spikes unlikely'

By YEO SAM JO

THE Potong Pasir Avenue 1 HUDC estate was privatised yesterday, but analysts are not expecting a significant rise in prices for units there because of the cooling property market.

The Housing and Urban Development Company (HUDC) estate next to the Kallang River comprises 175 flats in Blocks 110 to 112. It was converted to strata-titled property under the Land Titles (Strata) Act, the Housing Board said in a statement.

"Usually HUDC flat owners can fetch a higher price with privatisation. The key incentive for the buyer is that one day the estate might be sold en bloc," said SLP International Property Consultants research head Nicholas Mak.

"But this estate has privatised at a time when the market is soft – demand is weaker and prices are also lower – so the jump in price may not be as much."

R'ST Research director Ong Kah Seng said that with privatisation, the estate's prices will "hold better" because of its en bloc and redevelopment potential.

But he said investors and buyers might hold back because of a "substantial increase in leasing competition". This is due to more residential projects launching in the area, such as upcoming condominiums Sennett Residence and Sant Ritz, and the impending Bidadari housing estate, he said.

This is the 17th of Singapore's 18 former public housing estates to go private, and the fourth since May this year. The last remaining HUDC estate, Braddell View, has already garnered the required 75 per cent support to proceed with privatisation.

The 18 HUDC estates were introduced from 1974 to meet the demand for homes from middle-income households priced out of private property. The scheme was phased out in 1987 when more housing choices were introduced.

Privatisation of HUDC estates was announced in 1995 to meet rising aspirations of Singaporeans to own private housing, and to enable owners to have more control over their estates.

By going private, the Potong Pasir Avenue 1 estate's common properties will no longer be maintained and managed by the Potong Pasir Town Council. Instead, the Management Corporation Strata Title (MCST) Plan No. 4010 has been constituted to do this.

Flat owners will also own their respective units, and have a share in common properties such as carparks and open landscaped areas.

Pro tem committee member and Block 110 resident Mathew Mathai told The Straits Times that an annual general meeting will be held by the end of September to elect the MCST members.

The 56-year-old marine manager added that a carpark barrier and fence are on the cards, but it will be left to the MCST to decide that in consultation with the residents.

"I would like to see a fence," said financial service consultant Linda Ng, 44, who lives in Block 110. "Right now a lot of strangers come in to use our carpark and resting tables and leave their litter behind."

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Shunfu Ville is set to be privatised - by narrow vote

HUDC estate secures more than the required 75% votes in second mass signing exercise.

SHUNFU Ville is one step closer to becoming the first HUDC estate in the last nine months to be privatised.

Industry sources told *my paper* that the 358-unit estate located along Marymount Road has secured "slightly more" than the required 75 % of votes since its second mass signing exercise five weeks ago.

This comes after the 528-unit Laguna Park in Marine Parade was converted into a strata-titled estate last July, the last HUDC estate to do so.

Mr. Philip Liau, chairman of the Shunfu's pro-tem committee, said yesterday that they are waiting for the HDB to confirm the estate's eligibility in filing for privatisation.

Another HUDC estate, Serangoon North, also looks set to be privatised.

The 244-unit estate had held its first mass signing exercise at the end of last month, and more than half the residents have given their thumbs up to the idea so far.

The legal representatives for both pro-tem committees, from Tan & Au LLP, confirmed that they have started the process of privatisation for both Shunfu Ville and Serangoon North.

The firm added that there has been strong response from both estates and the residents have appeared to be "very enthusiastic".

Should Shunfu Ville qualify for privatisation, the residents will not only be eligible for a collective sale, they will also be able to purchase a second property.

In privatisation, residents essentially pay the HDB to take over the ownership of common property such as carparks and landscaped areas.

They will also replace the town councils in managing the estate.

The committee had initially amassed about 67 per cent of the votes, but Mr. Liau, 57, said they managed to meet the stipulated 75 per cent after going door-to-door.

But he said: "We still have to garner more votes because some of the owners are selling their flats."

"We need to get the new owners to vote as well."

Shunfu residents' earlier attempts at privatisation did not succeed.

In August 2001, the estate conducted its mass signing exercise, but only half of the residents voted in favour.

Not wanting to give up, some residents sought for a privatisation-cum-collective sale in July last year, but this was also rejected.

Over at Serangoon North, the lawyers have declined to reveal the exact number of votes obtained, but mentioned that the response thus far is considered good for a first attempt.

Meanwhile, another HUDC estate, Eunosville, has also obtained the required 75 % of votes.

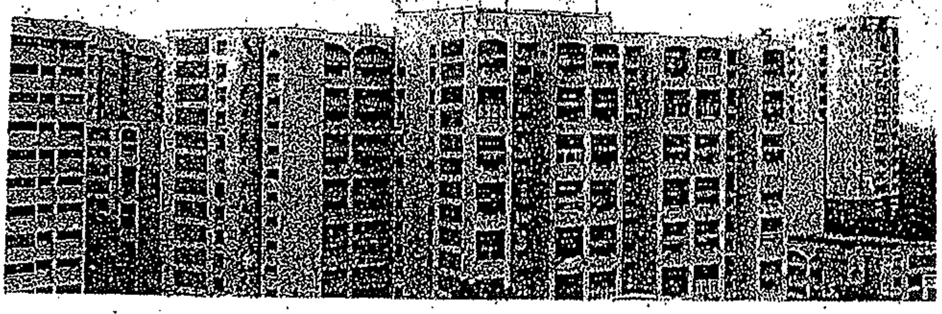
There are 18 HUDC estates in Singapore and 11 have already been privatised.

HUDCs were built in the 1970s and 1980s to cater to those who were not eligible for HDBs, yet could not afford private housing.

For more my paper stories click here.

Hougang Ave 7 HUDC privatisation delay

Town Council keeps mum on accounts



STALLED: This HUDC estate in Hougang cannot be privatised without its statement of accounts.

TNP PICTURE: GAVIN FOO

REPORT: DESMOND NG
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WHERE'S our money?
How much do we have in the sinking fund?
And why are you keeping quiet?

Some irate residents from a Housing and Urban Development Company (HUDC) estate in Hougang Avenue 7 raised these questions through a letter of demand issued through their lawyers to the Hougang Town Council earlier this month.

In February this year, 233 of the 286 units – or 82.5 per cent – in blocks 344 to 350 of this HUDC estate had voted in favour of privatisation.

For an HUDC estate to be privatised, 75 per cent of residents need to support the move. HDB will facilitate the process only if the required mandate is obtained.

When an estate is privatised, part of the sinking fund – contributed by owners of these blocks over the years and held by the town council – is returned to the residents.

The pro-tem committee for this estate said they needed to know about the estate's financial health to plan for the privatisation process ahead.

The money will be used for various legal, survey and construction works for the privatisation, such as fencing around the estate and erecting a carpark gantry.

Privatisation means HUDC residents become owners of their units as well as the common property, and in turn have more control over the running of their estate.

They will also no longer be subjected to HDB's housing policies such as having to seek approval to sublet their flats.

The estate was unexpectedly thrust into the limelight when the People's Action Party (PAP) candidate for Aljunied GRC, Mrs Lim Hwee Hua, queried Hougang Town Council's silence about its accounts on this issue.

She was speaking to reporters during a visit to Kaki Bukit on Monday, reported Channel NewsAsia.

She said this was troubling as residents were asking many questions but the town council run by the Workers' Party (WP) has kept quiet.

She said: "Is it just messy or are they holding back till after the elections so that whoever wins Hougang will then inherit the accounts? The WP has always emphasised transparency and accountability of the town council. It is very perplexing why they have kept very quiet."

PAP'S Aljunied team leader, Mr George Yeo, also made references to it during a press conference yesterday.

Not transparent

He said: "Hougang Town Council accounts are not transparent. Why has there been no response to the request by the HUDC pro-tem committee for information about money that belongs to them?"

WP's chief Low Thia Khiang responded to the HUDC issue at the WP's rally in Sengkang last night. (See report at right.)

Tan & Au Partnership, the law firm handling the legal paperwork for the estate, said it issued a letter of demand to the town council on April 6 asking it to confirm within seven days that it would comply with the clients' request for the statement of accounts.

Lawyer Carolyn Tan said the town council didn't respond to the letter.

Ms Tan said that this will delay the estate's privatisation process, which can be as quick as a year, or up to four years if there are road blocks.

She added: "Knowing how much the estate has is crucial because the residents need to do some privatisation works first.

"They have to build fences, a management office, a carpark gantry and bring the estate up to mark before the estate can be legally privatised."

Ms Tan said that she has handled the privatisation process for other HUDC estates such as Bedok Reservoir, Serangoon North and Minton Rise.

And usually, it takes just a couple of days to get details of these accounts from the various town councils about the respective HUDC estates.

When contacted, HDB said that it had on various occasions (between Oct 2010 and April 2011) requested the Hougang Town Council to provide the estimated balance operating and sinking funds to the pro-tem committee but the town council has not done so.

More GE reports /PAGES 6-9

Account segregation takes time

WORKERS' Party (WP) chief Low Thia Khiang gave a lengthy response to the HUDC issue at the WP's rally in Sengkang last night.

The account of Hougang Town Council, he said, like any town council under the PAP, has to be audited by a public accountant and approved by the Ministry of National Development (MND).

After the audit is completed, it has to be submitted to the MND and the Auditor-General for approval. Then, like all statutory boards, it ha[s] to be presented to the Parliament and circulated to every Member of Parliament.

"If the account is messy as what she (Mrs Lim Hwee Hua) claimed, why would MND and the Auditor-General approve it?" Mr Low asked.

He added that when he took over the town council in 1991 after being elected, the HUDC estate was part of the Hougang estate managed by the town council, and as such, shared an account with it.

"Now that these blocks are to be privatised, and they will manage themselves like condominiums, the accounts and expenses attributed to them need to be segregated," he said.

"The balance will then be transferred to the account by a date given by the HDB. Since this is the first time Hougang Town Council has neede[d] to do this, we want to be extra sure that the account separation is done properly. We wante[d] to avoid future disputes on the final amount transferred to the HUDC when it is privatised."

Mr Low said that Hougang Town Council wrote to HDB on Aug 23 last year to ask for "advice and guidance on method, format and principle to separate the account" after receivin[g] the privatisation note.

Town Council's call

On Nov 24, the HDB replied that Hougang Town Council would have to decide on the basi[s] of splitting the account.

Hougang Town Council, he said, then starte[d] preparing for the process by discussing with the auditor the job scope and modification of the computer system to capture the expenditure an[d] receivables separately.

On March 17 this year, the auditor was appointed and on April 11, "the certified apportioned sinking funds based on audited accounts as at 31 March 2010, was completed", said Mr Low.

Hougang Town Council, he added, is now in the process of "capturing expenditure apportioned to the HUDC estate between 31 March 2010 and 31 March 2011".

Mr Low said: "Once the audited account is completed and presented to Parliament, Hougang Town Council will give a copy to the pro-tem committee."

He said that on April 6, HDB told Hougang Town Council that they have "obtained the required consent for privatisation, but the duration to legally privatise the estate is 2 1/2 years".

Mr Low said that upon calling for a report o[n] the issues, "Hougang Town Council has given me the correspondence between the town council, the HDB and the pro-tem committee chairman".

"It seems that everyone was in the loop exc[ept] Mrs Lim Hwee Hua," he added.

– Maureen K[...]

B5 Experts identify 45 'sacred' heritage sites

B6 Political science don Milne dies

Hougang Ave 7 HUDC estate all set to go private

With its conversion on June 13, only 2 HUDC estates are left to be privatised

By JANICE HENG

THE four-decade-long HUDC scheme is coming to an end, as yet another estate is completing its privatisation journey.

Hougang Avenue 7 HUDC estate is expected to be successfully privatised on June 13, The Straits Times has learnt, leaving just two others in the midst of doing so.

That will make it the 16th out of 18 such projects to make the leap from public to private housing – and the third since May.

Such Housing and Urban Development Company estates, with large units and fancier designs, were introduced in the 1970s for middle-income families but began to be privatised after 1995.

For Hougang Avenue 7, the news was announced to residents in a May 28 letter from the pro tem committee overseeing this process, with copies put up on void deck notice boards.

The estate, comprising 286 units in Blocks 344 to 350, will then become a strata-titled property under the Land Titles (Strata) Act.

The Aljunied-Hougang-Punggol East Town Council (AHPETC) will no longer be responsible for its management and maintenance.

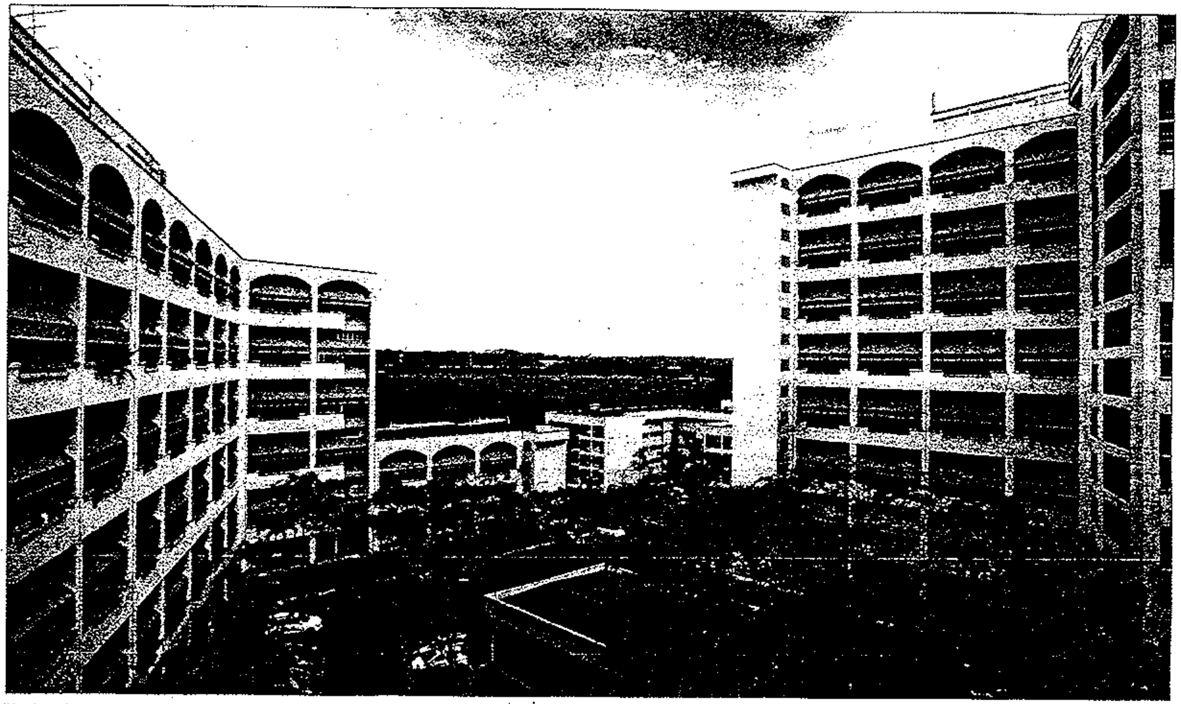
Instead, residents will have to elect a management corporation strata title (MCST) council to take over.

They will also have more control over their units and the common property. Housing Board restrictions on selling flats to foreigners, for instance, will no longer apply.

And improvement works can take place.

Some are already under way, such as the addition of carpark spaces. Next up are gantries for vehicle access.

A boundary fence has also been planned. But whether it goes ahead will be up to the residents to decide once the MCST is elected, said pro tem committee chairman Lee Meng Chin.



The HUDC estate in Hougang Avenue 7 comprises 286 units in Blocks 344 to 350. Some improvement works are already under way, such as the addition of carpark spaces. Next up are gantries for vehicle access. A boundary fence is also planned. ST PHOTO: KEVIN LIM

This is because the sinking fund is much less than expected, he added, though he declined to reveal the exact figure.

Hougang Avenue 2 HUDC, which went private last month and was also previously under AHPETC, faces a similar issue.

Its fencing plans have been put on hold until its MCST is elected due to limited funds.

But residents are in no rush to follow in the footsteps of some HUDC estates privatised in the mid-2000s, which were sold en bloc to private developers.

> **NOT SELLING YET**
>
> **I did vote for privatisation but I'm not in favour of going en bloc. With prices now, I think it's not possible to buy a unit with the same floor area elsewhere.**
>
> **– Retiree Steven Ng, 62, a resident of Hougang Avenue 7 HUDC estate**

"I did vote for privatisation but I'm not in favour of going en bloc," said retiree Steven Ng, 62.

"With the prices now, I think it's not possible to buy a unit with the same floor area elsewhere."

HUDC units tend to be larger than 150 sq m. A five-room flat, in contrast, is around 110 sq m.

Other owners are also holding on to their flats.

HDB records show that no Hougang Avenue 7 HUDC units have changed hands in the last year.

But HUDC units which do enter the resale market tend to be sought after, going for as much as $1.1 million, as a 151 sq m apartment in Serangoon North did in January.

The last two estates still on the way to privatisation are Potong Pasir and Braddell View.

Braddell View was put up for privatisation only this January, but has already secured more than the 75 per cent support required.

About 80 per cent of its residents were in favour, said management committee chairman Alex Teo. This mandate was obtained late last month.

The tiny three-block Potong Pasir HUDC, with just 175 units, got the required support in January 2012. It is near the end of its journey as well, with official privatisation expected within a month or so, said pro tem committee chairman Sukhmindar Singh.

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THE STRAITS TIMES THURSDAY, JANUARY 30, 2014

HUDC and the story of housing windfalls

A chapter is coming to a close with last HUDC estate bound for privatisation

Singapore's 18 HUDC estates

	Privatised	Sold en bloc
Gillman Heights	1996	2007 (The Interlace)
Pine Grove	1996	–
Ivory Heights	1998	–
Minton Rise	2001	2007 (The Minton)
Waterfront View	2002	2006 (Waterfront Collection)
Tampines Court	2002	–
Farrer Court	2002	2007 (d'Leedon)
Amberville	2002	2006 (Silversea)
Lakeview	2003	–
Chancery Court	2004	–
Laguna Park	2007	–
Eunosville	2011	–
Shunfu	2013	–
Serangoon North	In progress	–
Hougang North N3	In progress	–
Hougang North N7	In progress	–
Potong Pasir	In progress	–
Braddell View	Seeking mandate	–

By JANICE HENG

FIRST built as affordable homes for the sandwiched middle class, they were a ticket to a windfall three decades later. With the last HUDC estate heading towards privatisation – Braddell View – that chapter in Singapore's housing story is drawing to a close.

It began with little fanfare in the Budget debate of 1974.

MPs wanted middle-income earners to be able to buy private property with Central Provident Fund savings.

Then Minister of State for Labour Sia Kah Hui turned them down, but signalled: the Government would be building, "in the very near future", flats for this exact middle-income group.

Three days later, then Minister for Law and National Development E.W. Barker gave details.

The aim: to provide homes for the sandwiched class of young professionals and executives, who earned too much for a Housing Board flat but too little to afford private housing.

This, as Housing and Urban Development Company manager Lim Poh Guan put it in a 1976 interview, was "so that they could have a stake in the country".

The five estates of the pioneer batch were an ambitious alternative to condominium living.

Some, such as Braddell View – which the Ministry of National Development on Tuesday announced has been designated for privatisation – and Farrer Court, were conceptualised as green, sprawling spaces. The 618 units in Farrer Court estate, for instance, had 838,488 sq ft of land to themselves – about 2½ times the size of the Padang.

Others commanded views of parkland, such as Lakeview estate in Upper Thomson Road, or the sea, like Laguna Park and Amberville in the east. They featured landscaped grounds, playing fields and covered carparks. And the three-bedroom flats they contained, which came in two sizes, were larger than any before.

The smaller ones, at 139 sq m, are more than twice the size of a new three-room flat today.

And the larger ones, at 158 sq m or 1,700 sq ft, remain among the biggest public flats ever.

Who lived in them? Four in five buyers were aged below 35, said the HUDC in 1976. They were doctors, teachers and engineers; architects, accountants and assistant managers.

The smaller, cheaper units proved more popular with these young professionals. In 1977, balloting began for the second phase of HUDC estates, and a waiting list began to build.

Going upmarket

BUT in 1979, things took a sharp, upmarket turn. Phase II units in Chancery Court, Amberville and the second part of Braddell View cost up to 20 per cent more than their predecessors.

And the HUDC added that it was going to focus on higher-priced, better-quality units.

The reason? A new option had emerged for middle-income buyers: HDB executive apartments, which would also be cheaper.

For the same reason, smaller HUDC units would no longer be built. Phase II flats were an intermediate size, at 155 sq m.

And the HUDC introduced grander options, such as 178 sq m maisonettes in Chancery Court.

In 1980, the income ceiling for HUDC buyers was also raised, to a maximum combined family income of $6,000, up from $4,000.

Coming down to earth

TILL then, HUDC estates might have been seen as exclusive preserves of the middle class, ensconced in leafy surrounds.

But that was an image that then Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew, for one, did not want.

In 1981, at a New Year party in his Tanjong Pagar ward, Mr Lee urged the middle-income to live and mix with their less well-to-do neighbours. He also exhorted them to take leadership in their communities, for instance in residents' committees.

Later, then National Development Minister Teh Cheang Wan followed up with the announcement that more HUDC flats would be built in HDB estates, for a balanced mix of residents.

"They will become an integral part of public housing," he said.

Phase III thus included HUDC flats in Bedok North, Hougang and Jurong East, alongside Gillman Heights and Pine Grove developments.

Yet even as the scheme aimed to put the middle-income in touch with the ground, it was losing steam. Private property prices were falling at the upper end; executive and resale HDB flats provided alternatives at the other.

In 1984, one in five of the 2,142 Phase III units on offer was rejected. Phase IV faced a similarly lukewarm response. In 1987, there were 704 HUDC flats completed but lying empty.

And so, that year, the HUDC scheme came to an end. It eventually had 18 estates and 7,731 units to its name.

Going private, going en bloc

BUT the story was far from over for existing HUDC estates.

In 1995, the HDB announced that it would start privatising them, letting home owners have control of their estate.

This was not entirely out of the blue. In 1982, the HDB took over the estates from the original HUDC, and faced complaints about bad service. It decided to let the Phase I and II estates run themselves – while still remaining public housing – from 1986.

In 1996, however, it was the Phase III estates which first took the leap. Between then and 2001, Gillman Heights, Pine Grove, Ivory Heights in Jurong East and Minton Rise in Hougang went private.

In 2002, they were joined by Waterfront View and the newer Tampines Court – as well as their predecessors. From 2002 to 2004, four of the first six HUDC estates privatised.

At first, residents focused more on upgrading plans and the higher prices which their units now commanded.

But privatisation opened the door to an enticing prospect: a collective sale of the entire estate to private developers. The greatest obstacle was securing the approval of 80 per cent of all residents.

But in 2005, amid a feverish property market, one estate after another started to gain this approval and go on the market.

And in January 2006, the first HUDC estate went en bloc: the 168-unit Amberville estate, which sold for $183 million.

This works out to $1.09 million per unit, which was said to be at least 85 per cent over the market value then – and also quite a windfall, considering that a three-bedroom flat there originally went for under $100,000.

The next year-and-a-half saw a flurry of en bloc deals for Waterfront View, Minton Rise and Gillman Heights. In June 2007, the 618-unit Farrer Court went for $1.34 billion, in the largest ever collective sale of a residential site.

But that was to be the last collective sale for years.

The rest of 2007 saw failed en bloc attempts by Pine Grove, Lakeview and Chancery Court.

In the years since then, some have tried again, while others have tried and failed. Meanwhile, latecomers were finally getting on the road to privatisation.

Eunosville went private in 2011, and Shunfu last year. Four more estates have garnered enough votes from residents to begin the legal process.

Now, the last remaining HUDC estate has started its journey.

On Tuesday, it was announced that Braddell View was designated for privatisation. Its management committee says it is close to securing the required mandate of 75 per cent from its residents.

"Symbolically, the designation marks the end of the HUDC era," said Minister for National Development Khaw Boon Wan.

But though the historical chapter may have closed, the story will keep unfolding.

For one thing, Braddell View's privatisation will take about another year and a half, and four other estates are still in the process.

For another, as long as the possibility to go en bloc remains open, some may chase it. Eunosville, for one, launched its second en bloc attempt just last month.

And any such pursuit could be a long and trying one.

The sprawling size of HUDC estates makes them intimidating to developers, says Century21 chief executive officer Ku Swee Yong.

And getting all residents on board in the first place can be a struggle. In 2008, for instance, Laguna Park saw tussles between residents who wanted a collective sale and those who did not. The cars and mailboxes of the unwilling were hit by vandals. "There's a strong sense of attachment among residents too, in most potential en blocs, and some may be above monetary reasons for relinquishing their homes," said R'ST Research director Ong Kah Seng.

As Braddell View resident and retiree K.C. Lam, 81, put it: "This is my home. Might as well own it."

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C M K

Wing Fong Mansions condominium at 12 Lorong 14 Geylang has been launched for collective sale at S$176 million. SOURCE: GOOGLE MAPS

Wing Fong Mansions and Wing Fong Court up for collective sale

By Fiona Lam
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Singapore

FREEHOLD condominium Wing Fong Mansions in Geylang has been launched for collective sale with a reserve price of S$176 million, marketing agent PropNex Realty told *The Business Times* on Wednesday.

It is up for tender along with the adjacent condo, Wing Fong Court, which was put on the market two weeks ago at a reserve price of S$108 million.

At least 80 per cent of the owners at Wing Fong Mansions have given their consent for an en bloc sale, lead property consultant Richard Hau from PropNex told BT.

The 130-unit, eight-storey property is located at 12 Lorong 14 Geylang and has a total strata area of around 142,149 square feet.

Wing Fong Mansions spans a land area of 47,880 sq ft, while the Wing Fong Court site occupies 29,334 sq ft.

Also marketed by PropNex, the 88-unit, eight-storey Wing Fong Court is located at 10 Lorong 14 Geylang and has a total strata area of about 87,791 sq ft.

The land rate for Wing Fong Court works out to S$997 per square foot per plot ratio, based on the development charge baseline of 108,403 sq ft in floor area according to the Urban Redevelopment Authority (URA). Proposals exceeding this floor area are liable for development charge.

Both freehold sites are zoned for commercial or institutional use with a 2.8 plot ratio.

Any redevelopment will not attract additional buyer's stamp duty.

Together, Wing Fong Mansions and Wing Fong Court make up "one of the largest and most promising land sites in Geylang", Mr Hau said.

There is a possibility of linking the two sites underground with a basement level and forming one integrated development, although this will be subject to URA approval of an outline application, Mr Hau told BT.

The condos are situated in Geylang, which is undergoing a major revamp into a commercial environment. They are a 10-minute drive to the central business district.

Also in the vicinity is the Paya Lebar Quarter, a four-hectare mixed-development with retail, office and residential components.

Carolyn Tan of Tan & Au LLP, the solicitors for both collective sales, said: "We are excited to be part of the process for the gentrification of Geylang. It is hoped that this Geylang area will become the new 'French Quarter of the East' in Singapore – an entertainment district with art galleries, antique stores and jazz clubs boasting Bohemian vibes and a quaint, distinctive character."

Both tenders close at 4 pm on May 18.

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Thursday, July 7, 2022

MARKETS

	Wednesday	Change
STI	3,103.66	-0.45
KL COMP	1,420.85	-19.96
NIKKEI 225	26,107.65	-315.82
HANG SENG	21,586.66	-266.41
SHENZHEN B	1,204.03	-5.21
DOW (11am EDT)	30,939.98	-27.84

DAILY DEBRIEF

The STI

Reits show strength even as Singapore shares close flat

Singapore shares closed unchanged on Wednesday (Jul 6), even as regional markets mostly fell, with strength recorded among real estate investment trusts (Reits). The benchmark Straits Times Index (STI) fell 0.01% or 0.45 points to close at 3,103.66. **COMPANIES / 9**

Malaysia raises interest rate to 2.25% amid 'positive growth prospects'

Malaysia's central bank on Wednesday (Jul 6) moved to increase the key overnight policy rate (OPR) by 25 basis points to 2.25%. **TOP STORIES / 2**

Large GLS residential sites may help tame land prices, but also heighten risks for developers

When the second half 2022 Government Land Sales programme was unveiled on Jun 7, observers were generally not surprised that the authorities had raised the supply of private housing units (including executive condominiums) from the confirmed list sites by 26% versus H1. **COMPANIES / 6**

Finance sector pares training subsidies for staff

Training subsidies for staff in the finance industry will soon be scaled down, as part of changes meant to support a focus on growth and priority areas in the sector. **BANKING / 15**

EN BLOC SALE

People's Park Centre could spur Chinatown rejuvenation if sold

Mixed-use development is up for collective sale via public tender with a S$1.8b reserve price

By Corinne Kerk
corinne@sph.com.sg

THE en bloc sale of People's Park Centre, if successful, could help rejuvenate the Chinatown area, but buying interest is likely to be limited to consortiums, given the high ticket price, consultants have said.

The mixed-use development at 101 Upper Cross Street was put up for collective sale via public tender with a S$1.8 billion reserve price, marketing agent ERA Realty Network announced on Wednesday (Jul 6).

This translates to a land rate of about S$2,620 per square foot per plot ratio, including the differential premium and the premium to top up the land tenure to a fresh 99-year lease, ERA added.

The commercial-cum-residential development, completed in 1976, comprises 324 retail units, 256 office units, 120 residential units and a car park. In its first collective sale attempt in 2019, the reserve price was S$1.35 billion.

The building sits on a plot spanning 95,467 square feet (sq ft), zoned under the Urban Redevelopment Authority's 2019 Master Plan; the gross plot ratio is 8.6, which means it can be built up to a gross floor area of 821,017 sq ft.

Noting that the property has an attractive location — being near the Chinatown MRT interchange and near historical landmarks — Wong Xian Yang, head of research at Cushman & Wakefield, believes there is opportunity to build an iconic integrated development in the heart of Chinatown, a development that could spur gentrification efforts in the area.

Tang Wei Leng, Colliers' managing director and head of capital markets and investment services, pointed out that many of the developments in the neighbourhood are ageing and in need of a new lease of life.

The commercial-cum-residential development comprises a total of 324 retail units, 256 office units, 120 residential units and a car park. PHOTO: BT FILE

She noted that the newly-completed State Courts, as well as the soon-to-be completed One Pearl Bank and a luxury hotel in the Mondrian chain, are already leading the change in the locality.

One Pearl Bank is being built on the site of Pearl Bank Apartments, which was sold en bloc to CapitaLand for S$728 million in February 2018. As of last month, 83 per cent of the new, 774-unit, 99-year leasehold condominium had been sold.

Together with widened roads and improved accessibility in the area, some older properties in the vicinity are already benefiting from the uplift created by the increased footfall, and new concept shops in food and beverage, lifestyle and wellness have sprung up, said Tang.

"Many shophouses are also being traded at high values and are in high demand by family offices," she said, adding that People's Park Centre presents an opportunity to redevelop a sizeable site in an area undergoing gentrification.

Agreeing, Huttons' senior director of research Lee Sze Teck said it is probably time to improve the whole mix in the area too.

"The stretch along Eu Tong Sen Street can do with some rejuvenation," he said. "Even if buildings there don't go en bloc, the retail mix probably has to be updated. It needs an overhaul."

He noted that Chinatown Point, across the road from People's Park Centre, has been notching up higher footfall than other nearby malls on weekends ever since its S$90 million revamp in 2012.

The mall was sold in 2019 by Perennial Real Estate Holdings and its consortium of investors, including Singapore Press Holdings, for S$520 million; the buyer was a fund managed by Pan Asia Realty Advisors (Singapore), a joint venture between Mitsubishi Estate Co and CLSA.

Huttons' Lee suggested that in People's Park Centre's case, the new buyer could even consider retaining the entire structure — changing the residential component to serviced apartments, a hotel or a co-living space, and revamping the mall's tenant mix.

"That would be cheaper than a complete redevelopment and is also more environmentally-friendly," he said. "Given what we are seeing with Golden Mile Complex, there is a possibility that old structures can be retained, while their internal organs undergo a major upgrade."

Completed in 1973 and gazetted for conservation, Golden Mile Complex was sold for S$700 million to a consortium comprising Perennial Holdings, Sino Land and Far East Organization in May. Apart from restoring the existing building and retaining its key features and signature terraced profile, the buyers will explore transforming the building into a mixed-use development with office, retail and residential components.

Colliers' Tang pointed out, however, that People's Park Centre's reserve price is "on the high side", given the current market environment with patchy global economic recovery, supply-chain disruptions, inflation and higher interest rates.

"We think the interest is likely to come from consortiums of developers and financial partners," she said. "The hurdle will be the higher cost considerations, which could pose a price mismatch in expectation between the sellers and buyers."

Since developers are more careful with purchases exceeding S$1 billion, Huttons' Lee reckons that perhaps up to 3 consortiums may make a bid for the site to share the risks.

"Although the price is slightly high, there is still merit in this site because the Chinatown MRT station is directly beside it, and it is very near the city," he said, noting that Raffles Place was a 5-minute drive or a short MRT ride away.

The chief executive of real estate consultancy firm Delasa, Karamjit Singh, said: "The plot is undoubtedly attractive for its location and scale. Developers and institutional investors would love these two attributes. The key question surrounds the price."

Should the site be sold, observers say it may encourage the owners of People's Park Complex — another old, mixed-use development down the road — to also take the collective sale route.

The tender for People's Park Centre closes at 3 pm on Aug 18.

Pine Grove gunning for fourth-time lucky in $1.95 billion collective sale

The Pine Grove en bloc tender is being launched amid heightened risks and compressed profit margins for developers. PHOTO: ERA

Grace Leong
Senior Business Correspondent
UPDATED

SEP 14, 2023, 05:44 AM

SINGAPORE – Pine Grove condominium is back on the bandwagon for a collective sale via public tender – this time at a reserve price of $1.95 billion.

The 660-unit former HUDC estate in Ulu Pandan, which has 60 years left on a 99-year leasehold, was previously put up for sale in 2019 at $1.86 billion.

This is the fourth collective sale attempt by Pine Grove since 2008, and the third time it has achieved 80 per cent consensus for the sale.

If successful, owners of 1,163 sq ft units in the project stand to get gross proceeds of about $2.39 million, while those who own 1,934 sq ft homes could get $3.2 million, according to marketing agent ERA Realty Network.

At $1.95 billion, the land rate works out to $1,434 per sq ft per plot ratio, after factoring in an additional 10 per cent bonus gross floor area under various incentive schemes.

The land rate also includes an estimated land betterment charge (LBC) of about $1 billion for intensification and lease upgrade to a fresh 99-year lease, ERA said. Developers pay an LBC for the right to enhance the use of some sites or to build bigger projects on them.

The 893,218 sq ft site has a gross plot ratio of 2.1 and can be redeveloped into a residential project with up to 2,050 new units, subject to planning approval.

Mr Tay Liam Hiap, ERA's managing director of investment sales, said: "Pine Grove is the largest residential site, both in terms of land size and price quantum, to be launched for sale (en bloc) this year.

"The site is launched now because we have a year from achieving the 80 per cent consensus to find a buyer for the site and make an application to the Strata Titles Board for a sale order."

Based on the better-than-expected tender result for a government land sale (GLS) site at Pine Grove (Parcel A), the owners are hopeful of a better outcome, it added.

In June 2022, a joint venture between UOL Group and Singapore Land Group came out tops with a bid of $671.5 million or $1,318 psf ppr for the GLS plot – just $800 ahead of a bid from a unit of Allgreen Properties. The plot had attracted five bids in what analysts described as one of the tightest races at the time.

But Colliers' head of research in Singapore, Ms Catherine He, noted that despite the tight race, the number of bids was still lower than the average of seven received for tenders that closed earlier in 2022.

Although unsold new home supply remains low, developers face heightened development risks from higher construction costs, growing macro-economic uncertainty and dampening effects from the latest rounds of cooling measures, said Mr Wong Xian Yang, head of research for Singapore and South-east Asia at Cushman & Wakefield.

"The en bloc market also faces competition from the GLS programme. The Government has ramped up the supply of GLS sites to cool prices and may continue to do so. Some developers prefer to acquire GLS land as the process is more straightforward," he said.

According to Cushman, only three projects with a total value of over $665.2 million were sold en bloc from January to August 2023, down from 11 projects with a total value of $1.87 billion sold in the same period in 2022.

"The gap between buyers and sellers continues to weigh on the overall en bloc market. Developers are cautious on bids, while sellers' expectations have remained steady as replacement costs are high," Mr Wong said.

A Knight Frank report in April 2023 noted that only a third of collective sales have succeeded in the current cycle, down from 60 per cent in the 2017-2018 boom cycle as developers turn cautious in the face of heightened risks and compressed profit margins.

Pine Grove condominium is back on the bandwagon for a collective sale via public tender – this time at a reserve price of $1.95 billion. ST PHOTO: JOYCE FANG

The most recent successful residential en bloc deal involved the sale of Kew Lodge, a freehold landed residential site in District 11, to Woh Hup subsidiary Aurum Land for $66.8 million.

Pine Grove was one of the first two HUDC estates to be privatised in 1996. Out of 18 former HUDC estates developed between 1974 and 1987, Pine Grove ranked second in terms of land size, after Braddell View, and followed by the former Farrer Court.
The tender for Pine Grove will close at 3pm on Nov 29.

Reserve price for proposed collective sale of Wintech Centre raised to $98 mil

By Atiqah Mokhtar
/ EdgeProp Singapore |
April 26, 2023 4:18 PM SGT

Wintech Centre (Photo: Wintech CSC)

SINGAPORE (EDGEPROP) - The owners of Wintech Centre, a strata-titled light industrial building at 6 Ubi Road 1, are one step closer to launching the property for en bloc sale. *(See potential condos with en bloc calculator)*

The collective sale committee (CSC) for the development was appointed in August 2021 and has since been working to get the required consent from the majority of owners. “I think it’s very likely we’ll be getting the 80% approval soon,” says Ken Lim, chairman of the CSC. The proposed reserve price for the targeted collective sale, previously set at $84 million, has been revised to $98 million.

The CSC’s optimism follows the sale of J’Forte Building, a high-spec industrial building located less than a 10-minute drive from Wintech Centre, earlier this year. On Jan 30, Metro Holdings and Boustead Projects announced that they, together with an independent institutional third-party, were jointly acquiring J’Forte Building for $98.8 million. The sale of the eight-storey property on Tai Seng Street was brokered by Knight Frank.

Lim notes that Wintech Centre is already starting to receive interest ahead of the collective sale launch. “We’ve had some enquiries from certain investors, including a REIT fund,” he discloses. He views the current environment as an opportune time to launch the sale, especially coming off the recent property cooling measures that came into effect last December. “Given [the measures], we think additional demand will be seen for industrial properties,” he says.

Map and overview of Wintech Centre (Source: EdgeProp LandLens)

Developed by Chiu Teng Group, a property developer and construction conglomerate specialising in commercial and industrial buildings, Wintech Centre was completed in 2001. The eight-storey building has a 60-year lease from 1997. It has a total of 104 strata units which are owned by 84 subsidiary proprietors.

Under the URA Master Plan, the building is zoned for B1 industrial use with an approved gross plot ratio of 2.5. The property sits on a land area of 64,713 sq ft and the current gross floor area is 161,782 sq ft.

Wintech Centre is located within 361m of the MacPherson MRT Station, which is an interchange for the Circle and Downtown Lines. It is just one stop from Paya Lebar MRT Interchange Station for the East-West and Circle Lines. The building is also located close to Tanjong Katong Complex, Joo Chiat Complex and City Plaza.

For the collective sale, Weston Vision Realty has been appointed as the sole marketing agent, and Tan & Au LLP has been appointed as the lawyer.

Recent resale transactions at Wintech Centre (Source: EdgeProp Research)

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LEE MENG MEW

Lee Meng Mew graduated from the National University of Singapore in 1981 with an LLB (Hons) degree and was called to the Bar in January 1982. A Notary Public, he has been in private practice for more than 27 years. He has a wealth of experience having worked as a Legal Associate with Messrs. Toh & Toh, Messrs. Tan Chia & Teo, Messrs. Robert KB Teo & Co and Messrs. Wee Swee Teow & Co before commencing practice as a Partner in Messrs. Lui Lee & Leong in May 1989.

Lee Meng Mew practised as a Partner in Messrs. Lui Lee & Leong from May 1989 to 30 June 2003, doing mainly litigation work, including litigation relating to sale and purchase of property. Messsrs. Lui Lee & Leong also handled a sizeable volume of conveyancing work, including en-bloc sales and purchases, in the course of which the firm represented various banks and financial institutions.

The firm of Lui Lee and Leong was dissolved on 30 June 2003 and Lee Meng Mew commenced practice as a Sole-Proprietor under the name of "Lee Meng Mew & Co" from 1 July 2003 until today. His area of practice includes general litigation relating to contractual disputes, debt recovery, employment contracts, insurance claims as well as general solicitors' work involving the drafting of wills and agreements for sale of shares, employment contracts amongst other areas. He also handles divorce and estate matters, as well as conveyancing.

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YEO POH TIANG

Poh Tiang graduated from the University of Birmingham, United Kingdom and went on to be called to the Singapore Bar. She was subsequently admitted as a solicitor of the Supreme Court of England and Wales.

Poh Tiang began her legal career at two major law firms where she obtained substantial experience in various aspects of conveyancing and property transactions, banking, litigation, probate and administration, trusts and estate planning. Beyond her then designated portfolios, Poh Tiang had the opportunity to work on matrimonial and family law matters. It was not very long before she realised that her strength and passion lies very much in that area of law. Poh Tiang went on to practice in a firm which specializes in matrimonial and family law.

Her passion explains her decision to set up a law practice dedicated mainly to resolving family disputes and all aspects of family-related matters. Coupled with her conveyancing and property law knowledge, Poh Tiang could adequately advise her clients in matters relating to matrimonial assets, particularly to matrimonial homes.

On top of that, Poh Tiang routinely drafts wills and deals with probate and administration matters.

Poh Tiang is able to assist clients in the following areas:

- *Divorces, Contested or Uncontested*
- *Division of matrimonial assets*
- *Custody of Children including Variation of Custody Orders*
- *Deed of Separation*
- *Application for Wife and Children's Maintenance during marriage or after divorce, including Variation of Maintenance Orders*
- *Adoption, Contested or Uncontested*
- *Maintenance of Parents' Application (under the Maintenance of Parents' Act)*
- *Application for or Discharge of Personal Protection Orders*
- *Application for or Discharge of Domestic Exclusion Orders*
- *Wills*
- *Application for Probate and Letters of Administration*

The law firm that offers clients a peace of mind with its fixed legal fees packages.

Law firm's DIY portal aims to slash legal costs for divorce

Principal lawyer Beatrice Yeo of Yeo & Associates said she developed the portal "to help divorcing couples do up their own divorce and reach a settlement in the comfort of their homes". ST PHOTO: KUA CHEE SIONG

Step-by-step tool promises to cut hassle, but some lawyers do not see it taking off here

K.C. Vijayan
Senior Law Correspondent

A do-it-yourself kit is now available for couples intending to divorce amicably, making the process less costly for them.

A Chinatown-based divorce specialist law firm, with three branches in Yishun, Toa Payoh and Sengkang, has come up with an online DIY portal where simplified, uncontested cases are handled at $599 each.

Principal lawyer Beatrice Yeo of Yeo & Associates said she developed the divorcebureau.com.sg portal "to help divorcing couples do up their own divorce and reach a settlement in the comfort of their homes".

"This is provided they can still communicate with each other with a view to divorce amicably and work the terms out," she added.

The portal is a step-by-step tool, with a drop-down list of all the possible wordings normally used in a court order for both parties. When an application is completed, an entire set of legal documents will be generated and ready for filing in the Family Justice Courts.

The law firm's partner, Mr Yang Yongquan, said: "This is a purely DIY approach with instructions on how to fill in the forms, which takes about 20 to 30 minutes."

The online portal took off last year and the response has been very encouraging, he added.

The online fee excludes court filing costs, miscellaneous disbursements and an additional $150 payable if the client visits the office for legal advice. The estimated total cost should be $1,200.

Other law firms offer non-DIY packages for uncontested divorces, and fees can range from $1,500 to more than $3,000.

The DIY online method is meant to cut costs and time, said Ms Yeo.

At the Family Justice Practice Forum two weeks ago, Minister for Social and Family Development Desmond Lee noted that divorce cases filed under the simplified track with no contested issues soared to 53 per cent for the first half of this year. The figure was 24 per cent in 2015. There were around 7,600 divorcing couples last year.

Lawyers suggest the legal cost for a divorce is one of the biggest concerns for the parties. Anything beyond a simplified, uncontested one involving ancillary or complex matters, such as child custody and division of matrimonial assets, can see the cost escalate to between $20,000 and $100,000 or even more, said veteran family lawyer Aye Cheng Shone.

Elsewhere, Australian Family Law Courts have been using DIY procedures for some years with success, said Sydney-based family law accredited specialist Antonella Sanderson.

She said that in Australia, where no appearance in court is required, the DIY forms are submitted online and a registrar considers the application in chambers. If granted, both parties will receive the divorce certificate by e-mail.

Ms Sanderson described the process as "quick, easy and cost-effective". But she also cautioned that DIY kits do not offer legal advice.

But some family-law veterans such as Mr Rajan Chettiar do not see DIY taking off here for now.

"A DIY system has to be layman-friendly, simple and filed without a lawyer. I see more doing litigant-in-person cases nowadays," he said.

A litigant-in-person refers to someone who represents himself in court.

Saying that his firm's online portal is user-friendly, Mr Yang added that the DIY system has a future in Singapore.

"People who turn up in court as litigants in persons are usually contentious, who take up the court's time and may be redirected to seek legal advice or elsewhere.

"Even as court-led mediation gains pace to settle cases, DIY will also grow as an option that moves in the same general direction."

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